

From: David A. Cornelson
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 11/16/01 11:17pm
Subject: Poor Judgement

Dear DOJ,

I've been in the IT industry for 16 years, 10 as a consultant, 5 as an independent. For the past 5 years I have used almost entirely Microsoft tools and overall have used Microsoft software since I got into this business.

I'm about to shoot myself in the foot.

There's a chain of events that's been entirely whitewashed it seems. In the mid 1990's, Netscape was born and so was the first commercial web browser. In short order Microsoft created Internet Explorer, challenging a dominant Netscape product with a vastly inferior version 3 of IE. In a very short period of time though, Microsoft released not only IE 4, but it also released client/server development tools that worked strictly with IE 4. Microsoft had very strong relationships with Fortune 500 corporations that were already running Windows and so passing on these tools was a free ticket to stealing the browser market from Netscape or anyone else. With those built-in relationships and the strong-arm tactics used with both vendors and competitors, Microsoft used its monopoly to literally wipe out a competitor in a matter of months. IE became the dominant web browser in less than 18 months from its first release. No other company on earth could have turned the tables so quickly on an industry.

They claim to build a better product and this is true. But if you have Fortune 500 America testing your software (pre-release was something Microsoft used to speed poorly tested software to market), it's a sure bet things will shape up quickly. Netscape had no such inroads into corporate America. All they had was a popular product that could be downloaded for free.

Anyway - the rest is history. Netscape browsers have about 5% of the market now and IE has about 90%. This game is over.

So now we have Windows Media Player vs. Real Audio and QuickTime. It's almost ridiculous that the DOJ is ignoring this as another slam dunk. Using the same Fortune 500 foothold, Windows Media Player will, in less than 12 months, become the dominant media software. Real Media will likely go bankrupt (or get sucked into AOL) and have the DOJ to thank.

We also have MS Messenger. This might be a battle for a little while because AOL has such a large share of the home market, but with XP now shipping with it built in, AOL users are going to flock to a more easily accessed ISP (MSN) and...another slam dunk.

What's next? This will continue to happen to any software that becomes vastly successful in the vertical markets that runs on Windows. If I create some cool new thing that runs on Windows and I refuse to sell out to Mr. Gates, they'll just build their own and squash me like a bug. How? Because they can tie it to Windows. Why would someone purchase and/or download any software if it's already built into Windows? Go figure.

Microsoft can go on, but in my mind the original Netscape shareholders from before the AOL bailout should get a billion dollars and so should Sun for the Java fiasco. For any competing product that gets tied to Windows, all competitors should receive a direct payment. So Real Audio and Apple (QuickTime) should receive a cut as well.

If you're going to allow Microsoft to tie secondary software to Windows, then you should force them to compensate their competitors or force them to allow OEM's to install whichever competing software they so choose. In fact, I would give the OEM's an open license to modify Windows in any way they see fit as long as it doesn't effect security and reliability.

To do otherwise not only harms consumers, but likely will be seen as Microsoft having the government in their back pocket. You might as well give a seat at the table to Bill Gates.

David Cornelson
Geneva, IL
dcornelson@placet.com